DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 114 160 PS 008 051

AUTHOR Cohen, D. H.
TITLE Early Childhood: Link to the Future.
PUB DATE 14 May 75
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Development; Emotional Development; *Ethical Values; *Humanistic Education; Interpersonal Relationship; Moral Values; *Parent Child Relationship; *Social Development; Social Environment; *Social Values

ABSTRACT

This paper notes a devaluation of children in American society and urges that more attention be paid to the emotional growth of children, who are subject to the same forces that create in adults feelings of powerlessness, attitudes of superficiality and nonreflection, intolerance for delayed gratification, and confusion about self and interpersonal relations. The importance of warm human interaction and the way in which social-emotional development is inseparably intertwined with cognitive development are stressed and illustrated with references to Skeel's orphanage study and to Piaget and Freud. It is shown that the societal value of integrity in relations with others is slowly being lost, and teachers are urged to regain a sense of humanness, to clarify their moral and ethical values, and to strengthen in themselves a love of people, pride in work, and pleasure in contributing to others. Since children look to adults for clues to what is acceptable or not, it is suggested that adults make a careful choice of those values that they wish to pass on to the next generation. (GO)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Brooklyn College
May 14, 1975
D. H. Cohen

ED114160

Early Childhood: Link to the Future

A country's future is dependent on how it cares for its young. Yet a recent study by sociologist Sarane Boocock of Russell Sage shows that "not only is there accumulating evidence that many American children are not being adequately cared for, but there are also indications of a general devaluation of children and child rearing." She says, for example, "There have been increases in the number of divorces in which neither parent wants custody of the child. There are clues that many children ostensibly in the care of their parents are in fact left without care for long periods of time." It is commonplace for many children to "have little or no meaningful communication with adults in the course of the day. There seems to be less wanting of children in America... and data gathered in the last two decades show rather consistently that the presence of children is perceived as having a negative rather than a positive effect upon the husband-wife relationship. Members of childless marriages report greater marital satisfaction than those with children." In the area of public concern, the record is also uneven. We do not begin to have a climate of child advocacy that is a given in Scandinavia and in the socialist countries.

Whatever the reasons for these phenomena, and there are many, our interest here today is particularly with the devaluation of children. All of nature understands that there must be a positive investment in the young if the species is to survive, but to some extent, our society seems to be in conflict with nature's laws.

PS 008051

In early childhood education, as well as in parenting, the questions, "What shall children learn? What shall we teach?" lead to confusion and contradiction, just as all around us, every kind of value is being questioned--work, love, sexual roles and mores, family styles, schooling, male-female relationships, clothing, quality of food, honesty in government, ethics in medicine, and more. Some of the old values are being rejected in favor of their opposites, for example, repression is replaced by license in sex. Some are rejected for the alternative of nihilism, as the work ethic is rejected for scrounging. Yet we have to pass on values to the children with whom we have contact as parents or teachers, even as values were passed on to us. The values we pass on are a generation's link to the future.

There has been a quick judgement in recent years that the way to do this is to induct children into our technology as early as possible, and the pressure has grown unbelievably in a very short time to bring to younger and younger children the skills of reading, the skills of numerical calculation, the recognition of geometric shapes, and awareness of how to measure time on a calendar, among other specific techniques. But even as young children are put into adult postures to learn skills valued in the adult world, there is evidence that other, unexpected values from the adult world are coming through to children at the same time: Teachers find less than positive respect for people and materials among many children; there is exaggerated pretence about doing which projects a big show of enthusiasm and excitement but does not in the end produce much of anything. There are too many children with poor concentration and/or frenetic behavior, confusion about effort, and low tolerance for frustration. There are too many children who stand by and neither say nor do anything in reaction to aggressive behavior around them, as though it were a stable fact

of life that does not require a reaction; while some of the brightest children, who could be leaders, seem to idealize slyness, furtiveness, and manipulation of others.

Thus, even as we are deliberately inducting children into the beginning mechanics of our technological world, they are simultaneously subject to the same forces that among adults create feelings of powerlessness, attitudes of superficiality and non-reflection, intolerance for delayed gratification, confusion about self and about interpersonal relations. For example, at the adult level there are absenteeism, irresponsiblility, and contempt for work in response to the dehumanizing processes of automation that rob people of their right to think, and as a reaction to the assumption that mechanization, not human effort, is the answer to just about everything. Children do not know the adult reasons why it does not pay to work hard, but they do know that it is the prevailing mode. Living side by side with us in a world of images, they also apparently deduce that a pretence of doing is what passes for doing. The pace of life that encourages superficiality in adults prevents children from learning to exercise reflective thought, because there simply is no time for reflection in anyone's life. Although children are basically action-oriented, they learn early to be passive and expect to be entertained rather than to entertain themselves. Even worse is the brutalization of our senses as a consequence of too many bombardments, defoliations, hi-jacking, terrorism, smalltime muggings, and injustices to our minority citizens which lead children to assume that violence is inevitable, natural, and a given. What those who care for children must recognize is that while the grown-ups cannot agree on what constitutes good education for young children, the children themselves are picking up from the environment the features most destructive to the

human psyche because they are the most obvious for literal-minded young children to see. It is time, therefore, that adults struggle to sort out their values so as to give children a sense of direction that is positive about human capacity—socially productive, and emotionally fulfilling—or the nation as a whole will bear the consequences of the increasing unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life that must surely follow. The question that ties us to a future worth having, is "How can children become people with a good sense of themselves and sensitivity to others? How can they become thinking citizens who care about their fellow human beings to the point of taking action on their behalf, so that the barbarism of self-interest and violence with which we all live can come to an end? How indeed can today's young children be a link to a future worthy of human existence?"

We in early childhood have in the past tended to stay outside the mainstream of adoration for the technical. We believed what was to us an obvious truth, that early and consistent affectional exchanges between children and adults lead to identification with adults, from whom children learn best. There is beginning experimental research to support this, the latest reported ~~a month ago in Denver~~ at the SRCD Conference in April 1975 by Carew, Chan, and Halfar. Believing this, we must stop being beguiled by the countless salesmen and prophets who try to sell us a variety of tools and techniques as more efficient replacements for the interpersonal relations we know most suit children's needs. The laws of human growth are not the same as those that govern either engineering operations or high finance. To those who seek to impose the laws of mechanical or business efficiency on the growth processes of children, we shall have to repeat in all ways we can, until it registers, that children do not grow up to be effective human beings in the same ways -- or to the same ends -- as machines. As one example

of the difference, let us note that children grow slowly, in direct contradiction to the bias for speed that has come to pervade our lives because the corporate world is served by speed. Too many children are penalized for their normally-slow growing, because our success in achieving speed with motors has caused us to forget that human growth is slow, "quiet and slow as the growth of a tree," as Agnes Snyder said. Nor do children develop in assembly-line fashion, one part at a time attached to another part, until the whole is made. Children grow in all directions at once. They are organic wholes from the moment of conception, and are still organic wholes a year, or two, or five years later. They think, act, and feel altogether in the same moment. If we ignore their feelings or their physical style, we do so at a price. They run the danger of becoming mechanical thinkers, emotionally shallow and morally undeveloped people.

It happens that the slowest aspect of all growth and the most important for humanness is emotional growth which serves as a basic underpinning of genuine intellectual, physical and social growth. How a person feels about him • or herself and others influences everything he does as all people know very well from their own life experience. Why teachers and psychologists have been willing to ignore this fact in these last turbulent years of our brutalization will some day make an interesting study if and when a sense of balance returns to our world and to education.

Emotions are profoundly <u>biological</u>. Studies of animals show affectional systems developing from infant--mother relationship, to age-mate and peer relationship, to heterosexual and then paternal. Harlow's monkeys, reared in defiance of their affectional needs could not play, or groom themselves, or mate. When eventually and reluctantly the females became mothers, they rebuffed and rejected their babie's demands with harshness.

Dogs have critical periods of socialization, which occur between four and fourteen weeks. Failure in animals trained as "seeing eye dogs has been analyzed as due to a protracted period of minimum human contact during early childhood."

In humans we suspect developmental sequences and critical periods too. This was indicated early by the work of Ribble, Goldfarb, Province and Lipton, Bowlby and Spitz. Some of this work led Loretta Bender to her famous dictum about tender loving care for children in hospitals, and led others to suggest foster placement instead of the efficient institutions in which interpersonal relations of an intimate character were meager. Importantly, more recent research by Bowby differentiates attachment from dependency, and points to attachment as a human need that is not necessarily associated with dependency. There is also general agreement now that if emotional ties are not established to a single individual in the early months and years, the internalization of adult standards is difficult. Children who do not have close, intimate relations with significant adults may find it hard to behave in human ways with other humans, and often cannot learn. Such insights must lead us to underscore once again what early childhood educators have long observed, the integration of learning and emotion.

A most dramatic example of this integration is the Skeels followup study of supposedly retarded children of the Davenport, Iowa, orphanage, who were sent as very young children to an institution for the mentally retarded. There they were embraced and cared for lovingly by the retarded adolescent girls who took them on as their own. The children thrived well enough to be put up for adoption within a few years, and indeed, left the institution for the normal community in time. When ~~Sheels~~ Skeels tracked them down 25 years later, comparison with controls was readily available among

the children who had remained at the orphanage because they had not been considered as retarded as those who had been sent out. The contrast was appalling. The originally less retarded group were found 25 years later still in institutions, passive, helpless, unable to cope. The group that had become adoptable via the intervention of tender, loving care offered by retarded youngsters were all self-supporting members of their communities, unidentifiable as different from the general population and certainly not perceived as retarded. They were mostly married and working at a variety of occupations, including one who was a social worker with a Master's degree.

All this is not to say that love is enough. We know from experience and from other research that stimulation is also necessary. But we have been acting for years as though external stimulation which can be observed is the central source of humanness, and that the impact of interaction with people, which cannot be measured precisely, is of little consequence. Admittedly when research is focused on one aspect of growth or the other, that may be the only reasonable way of trying to understand the parts of the whole. But when the results of one-sided research are applied to programs and curricula for young children, those who do so are being as pre-operational in their perception as the children on whose behalf the programs are supposed to work. Hopefully, we shall see a long overdue recognition that social-emotional growth and cognitive development are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to separate them, and that even that intricate relationship is dependent upon physical health. It is interesting to note some of the ways in which organically developing children act in concerted fashion to be complexly physical, emotional, social, and cognitive all at once. The phenomenon Freud called object cathexis, by which a child fixes on his mother with strong feelings of attachment, Piaget discovered as object constancy, which begins, says Piaget, with the mother. The fear of strangers so common in children of

nuclear families at about eight months is, therefore, the expression of both emotional deepening and cognitive awareness. The cognitive development of object constancy at which we have been looking so hard, is obviously rooted in emotional attachment to the primary nurturing person, who is in a social relationship with the child and its physical needs for survival, a total, intricate growth involvement.

Further, according to Piaget, the cognitive concept of mother as a permanent feature of a child's life, as a causally independent but familiar object, is completed at about the age of two. Studies of anxiety separation show age two to be a critical stage in the separation process, a potential time of crisis for the child who has not yet ~~sufficient~~ gained sufficient satisfaction from the world beyond himself to help balance out the sense of loss he is capable of understanding and feeling at this point of maturity. Still others point out that at the core of human attachment is the capacity for reciprocity; that reciprocity offers its own reward, because human beings are biologically social; and social interaction is inherently rewarding to children. All children experience social reciprocity through imitation, sharing, communication and play, combining their capacity for feeling with their capacity for thought as they tackle the world in physical style. Slowly they become less and less egocentric, making it possible for them to become increasingly more sensitive to the wishes and feelings of others, to sharing, and to mutual esteem as part of the general discovery of the intrinsic value of social relationships. They can become moral persons capable of caring about other human beings. But it is at this point that the clash occurs between the healthy social-emotional potential of a human being and the expectations of our society, driven as it is by a compulsion for possessing things toward increasing disregard for human beings. We know that an early step in children's

social-emotional maturing is their reaching out to peers in two directions simultaneously, with sympathy and empathy on the one hand and aggression on the other. They can thus identify with others and be defensive with others in the same period. But if we look ahead to their future, we will recognize that they need strong adult directions, and even bias, in favor of cooperation, sympathy, and empathy, because if there is neutrality about this in the nurturing adults, the children get a bias in favor of aggression from the larger society, turning as easily to aggression as to cooperation as a mode of relating. Experience in social groups geared to cooperative interaction show this to be true. That is why early childhood education cannot be determined outside of its relation to the future course of our society. We cannot leave it to chance that our children will learn that people matter when the world around them is too full of violence against people, hatred of people for people, exploitation of people by people, and disregard for the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of people. We cannot leave it to chance that our children will understand reality when reality and image are confused; we cannot leave ego strength to chance when the adults around them are slowly being reduced to anemic representations of competent beings; and we cannot be casual about moral development when the acknowledgment of right from wrong is so often a matter of creating images, not acting on moral conviction.

The deepest roots of human interaction are in motivation and feeling, to which the concept of integrity in relations with others was for a long time a shining ideal. Yet these concepts are slowly being lost to us. As examples, let me quote the trend of some recent newspaper items. A doctor who in good faith saved the life of a premature baby, because of existing lack of knowledge in medicine inadvertently caused blindness while saving her life. Twenty-two years later, he was successfully sued for causing the blindness, although no one on this earth could then have foreseen that effect. Students who fail courses may now bring their case

to the courts, as though there is an automatic relationship between teaching and learning; their argument seems to be that if they do not learn, they sue. Teachers who work hard at helping children who have had extraordinary deprivations imposed on them by an uncaring society are to be held accountable for the children's non-learning, although they may have tried everything available to their understanding. The fact that teachers themselves may be in no position to alter the conditions under which they work or the conditions of that child's total life, both of which may stem from societal and not personal inadequacy, is ignored. The court decisions in such cases are geared to the commercial concept of commodity exchange. As the courts assess the practitioner in the interpersonal profession as though they were purveyors of commodities, there is an important message for those of us who teach--we are not to use judgment, not to take calculated risks to save lives, not to try the as yet untested to help children, not to respond to human need with all the strength of knowledge, feeling, and conviction that can be mustered at a given time, because, if success is not forthcoming, the practitioner in the interpersonal professions can be destroyed for the very act of trying to exercise professional judgment. We once talked in our society and our courts about "good faith." We once knew that learning could not take place in our schools unless a teacher had faith in unmeasurable and undefinable potential and was willing to take chances. But who will want to take chances in an effort to save lives if a lawsuit is waiting in which such values as the concept of good faith and the recognition that the endless search for more knowledge is bound to include mistakes are being pushed aside? We may well ask why we are being reduced to that level of morality in which the concrete evidence of error is judged without consideration for motive, a rather low level of morality on all the developmental scales, and that will now apparently be the basis of

legal judgment about interpersonal professions. This is why it is possible to say that integrity as a value for human beings is under attack. For a long time now, integrity has been greeted in our society with cynicism and disbelief. Now that it will be legally dangerous to trust one's integrity in using judgment affecting our professional role, we face oblivion as people of conscience.

How are we to ask children to deal with their feelings in social ways? Shall they be kind and considerate? Care when someone is hurt? Give higher priority to people and ideas than to things? Higher priority to integrity than to money? How do we give them a vision of life in which work and love bring them satisfaction when so many things human are reduced to the level of commodity exchange?

Ausubel once pointed out that "at any particular stage in the historical development of a given culture, current political, economic, and social vicissitudes exert considerable influence on the traditional pattern of psychosocial traits transmitted to the growing generation. War, depression, famine, social disorganization, acculturation pressures, technological advances and rapid social changes are some of the more striking current factors that account for historical variation in culture matters, in the prevailing levels of frustration, and in anxiety in the quality of interpersonal relations."

So if teachers of young children are confused, they have good reason to be. And if they are frightened, there is cause for that too. But we cannot stay frightened. We have to think, analyze, trust our feelings, and take a stand. Especially those of us who grew up at a time and in a place or in a family where ethical values concerning relationships with people took priority over material possessions or personal achievement must look to our feelings about people for guidelines to the education of

young children and to the future of our country.

Early childhood became public property about a dozen years ago, but in the frame of reference in which devaluation of children is a norm, all its causes were promptly seized upon as a political football, journalists' meat, or a political club. But there have been some pluses that may stand us in good stead now. One is that the parents of poor children are now accepted members of the early childhood educational community, even as middle class parents always have been. Another is the host of materials around from which to draw for children's use if we use them wisely, which means sparingly, and at the right times. Concurrent with the devaluation there is respect for the impact of the early years on later development, a respect which has increased even as we are growing in understanding that that impact need not be final. Fourth is the fact that research is heading toward investigation of the social and emotional aspects of behavior because the emphasis on cognition has not been a hoped for panacea. For example, Burton White's research suggests a focus on the development of social skills in nursery school, something that Pavenstedt's study of The Drifters indicated in the early 1960's, and had Katherine Read's The Nursery School, a Human Relations Laboratory made clear in the 1950's. Yet if educators follow the leads of research without an adequate total sense of children and without a social philosophy, we will continue to fragment children and lose the precious thread to a future worth having, a future in which all people will have the power to think, the capacity to feel deeply, and the courage to cope with what life brings them. Let us remember that Piaget, who has been so revered and so misunderstood, has pointed out that peer interaction in early childhood supports growth toward conservation; that as the edges of a child's egocentricity are rubbed off by exposure to the perceptions of others. perspective broadens and thinking power increases. Interaction with others also has the virtue of encouraging reciprocity, which is the base for moral development. There is no reciprocity between a child and pencil and paper, between

a child and a tape recorder, between a child and a television show. Reciprocity occurs only between and among people. Thus, for newly understood reasons, we are back to what our observation of young children taught us long ago, that play between and among children is a basic vehicle for the deepening of feelings in early childhood; that interaction with and guidance from adults provides the moral guidelines for social maturity; and that interaction with people of all levels and with the physical environment support the expansion of intellectual growth.

We are engaged in a serious struggle in the field of early childhood education, a struggle to regain the right of children to their heritage of humanness. To win that struggle, and we can, we must ourselves regain a sense of humanness, clarify our moral and ethical values, strengthen our love for people, our pride in our work, and our pleasure in contributing to others. Unhappily, we must do this in a climate of cynicism, materialist priorities, fear, and anxiety which affect the parents of the children, the administrators of the schools and the legislations of our government. That cynicism, materialism, fear and anxiety are already influencing the youngest children because they are tuned into the mass media that reflect adult society in a way in which children never were before. If we are content with our current way of life, we have no problem. But if it is unsatisfying, we must not let it continue for the next generation. We have to have the courage to think clearly, feel deeply, and act decisively. Let us pick carefully the values we wish to pass on to the next generation with an eye to where they will lead in the children's future, and curriculum will follow as day follows night. Children are capable of the full range of thought

processes and feelings known to humanity, but they look to adults for clues to what is acceptable and what is not. If teachers will think and feel as only human beings are capable of thinking and feeling, at a level of social concern and social responsibility, our children will be a link to a future in which human beings can enjoy the fulfillment of lives well lived.